



NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

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GAP NARROWS IN PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION RATES OF RICH AND POOR CHILDREN BEGINNING SCHOOL

National Education Goals Panel

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – As children start school for the first time over the next several weeks, more are entering school with experience in preschool regardless of socio-economic background today than 10 years ago. The gap in preschool participation between 3- to 5-year-olds from high- and low-level income families has shrunk by 15 percentage points over the last ten years – from a difference of 28 percent in 1991 to just 13 percent in 1999. Preschool participation is one of four national indicators the Goals Panel uses to report progress towards Goal 1, that all children start school ready to learn.

“We are witnessing a dramatic jump in the number of quality child care centers available to all parents at all income levels,” said Governor Tommy Thompson (R-WI) a chair of the Goals Panel.

According to the Goals Panel, in 1991, 73 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds from families earning over \$50,000 a year attended pre-school compared to only 45 percent of children from families earning \$10,000 a year or less. By 1999, however, participation rates for children from high-income families in any center-based pre-school or day care program was 70 percent compared to a rise to 57 percent participation in pre-school programs for children of low income families.

“The evidence is mounting that quality early care and education really do help children enter school ‘ready to learn,’” said Dr. Edward Zigler, Sterling Professor of Psychology at Yale University. “This is particularly true for children who live in poverty.”

Several recently released reports, including a widely publicized July 2000 study issued by RAND, have noted the connection between preschool participation and improved student performance. For example, the recent RAND report found that NAEP scores were higher in states with more children in public pre-kindergarten programs. Texas, Wisconsin and Maryland led the states in the percentage of 4th grade students who had attended public pre-K programs. The report also noted the strong effect of pre-K participation has for children from low-income families. Other studies have reported that high quality child development programs show less grade retention, less placement in special education classes and other long-term benefits.¹

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¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Creating a 21st Century Head Start; Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion,” (Washington, D.C.: 1993) 7.

“High quality preschool and early childhood education programs are tremendously important, not only for preparing our young children for school, but for helping them develop skills, competencies, a sense of self and a foundation for learning throughout life,” said Mark Ginsberg, Executive Director of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The NAEYC is the nation’s largest organization of early childhood educators.

About the National Education Goals Panel

Created in July 1990, the National Education Goals Panel is a bipartisan body of federal and state officials made up of eight governors, four members of Congress, four state legislators and two members appointed by the President. The eight National Education Goals call for greater levels of: student achievement and citizenship; high school completion; teacher education and professional development; parental participation in the schools; literacy and lifelong learning; and safe, disciplined, and alcohol-and-drug-free schools. The Goals also call for all children to be ready to learn by the time they start school and for US students to be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement by the year 2000.

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